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## Intercultural Education from the Perspective of Training Didactic Competences

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### Abstract

The development of intercultural competences becomes the main objective of the training programs for students/future teachers as agents of developing European values, individually and socially. The component elements of the students' initial training program for the teaching career places in front the *Intercultural Education* within the study of optional subjects, which can be explained through the need of training/developing some persons that are conscious of their roots, so that they can have landmarks in order to find their place in the world. The actual system of initial training for the teaching career should be revised especially at the level of competences and contents.

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### 1. Introduction

Education has the duty to encourage diversity and to transform it in a constructive contributing factor to realize social cohesion, to harden the understanding between individuals and/or groups; “education can promote cohesion as long as it takes into account the individual and group diversity, trying in the same time not to provoke their marginalization or social outcast. The respect for individuality and diversity represents a main principle that has to lead to the elimination of any standard type of learning. The official learning systems are often accused that they restrain personal accomplishment, obliging the children to obey to the same cultural and

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intellectual pattern, without taking into consideration individual talents. They tend, for example, to develop abstract knowledge in favour of other qualities, like imagination, communication skills, ability to lead, the spiritual sense and dimension of our existence or craftsmanship. Depending on their skills and natural inclinations, that differ even from birth, children do not benefit in the same way from the community educational resources. They can suffer failure if the school they attend to do not emphasize their talents and ambitions” (Cozma T. , 2001, p.56 ). The right for differentiated education and recognition of special needs and capacities represent real markers of a quality education.

In the actual context of national education access to the European space the tendency of educational policy to connect to the value system of the contemporary world is the goal of the need to integrate the intercultural dimension in school curriculum. In this respect, intercultural dimension becomes a strategy which takes part with priority in the integrated system of values of educational space, management of alterity, training intercultural communication skills. In the context of intercultural education, new roles of teacher intend to develop in each of us appropriate and balanced attitudes to diversity, to strengthen our confidence in our cultural background and openness to others. Such specific attitudes and skills related to diversity are often called intercultural competence or capacity to intercultural. Intercultural competence is demonstrated by finding effective solutions to the problems appeared in intercultural contexts.

Major tendencies in curriculum reform at European level are: education for all, relevance of curriculum for the individual and society, development of desirable attitudes and values, skills, critical thinking, concern for appropriateness of training to the needs of each individual, maximize the potential of each child, teaching and learning student-centered, holistic assessment of performance.

Teachers are perhaps the most important partners in reforming the education system, so it is important that the teacher training system to meet these new developments in the curriculum. In this context, there are justified the modern theories that consider necessary to replace the teacher as "expert in a field, with the teacher - trainer, able to adapt to new, to mold continuously in time.

## 2. Intercultural education dimension of education today

The idea of "education for all" - or, better said, education tailored to the needs of each student - asks the teacher the ability to adapt to diversity of the students, to support its acquisitions, the motivation to achieve higher performance and develop the capacity of continuous education (Danescu E., 2010, p.132).

Differences in relation to the other relate to several areas: culture, language, religion, traditions, social practices of communication, networking, etc. Depending on these individual in interaction with the stranger may have a complex set of reactions such as cognitive, emotional, behavioral. These effects may be of acceptance or denial of the other. The problem of cohabitation "together", in this diversity is addressed is approached more and more in contemporary society.

Cultural diversity is not an injury, but a reality to be seized at school. Cultural plurality occurs not only the problem of differences, but cultural dialogue, which recognizes that everyone must contribute to enriching the human experience and each of them constitutes an effort of universality of a particular experience .

According to C. Bennett (1998, p.121), "intercultural education is an approach of the teaching-learning system based on democratic values and beliefs which tries to promote cultural pluralism in the context of a diverse society and an interdependent world".

Intercultural perspective of design education can lead to conflict mitigation and eradication of violence in school, through the formation of behavior such as: *the ability to communicate, cooperation and the establishment of trust within a group, respect for self and others, tolerance of different opinions, making decisions democratically, acceptance of responsibility to others and to own me, interpersonal problem solving, mastery of primary emotions, ability to avoid physical altercations.*

According to C. Cucos (2000, p.56), in this context, in general, and in terms of intercultural education, in particular, the renewal of teacher's role focuses on issues such as :

- the practice of human rights in school, giving priority to cooperative pedagogy and building
- confidence in the classroom;
- addressing issues from the perspective of the student;
- referral and acceptance of similarities and differences between student himself and the others and
- between students themselves;
- respect for students rights and expression of attitudes of sensitivity to the needs and interests;
- solving problems and ambiguous situations, complex, in class or school;
- ability to see themselves as students, as active members of the local community, national and global;
- ability to integrate its own priorities within a common framework of issues and values and to act on account of the students decisions;
- considering social and global context, fostering common approaches between teachers in order to manage issues;
- promotion of tolerant attitudes, openness, accepting and understanding the natural relationship me-other and the idea of stranger;
- recognition and respect for cultural differences by building positive relations of equality between
- men and not by applying polarity superior / inferior;
- capitalization of school policies that promote equal opportunity in education;
- strategies for recovery of cultural differences to transform them in teaching resources.

Synthesizing the new roles of teacher, in the context of intercultural education, it intends to develop in each of us balanced attitudes to diversity, to strengthen our confidence in our cultural background and openness to others. Such attitudes and skills appropriate to specific diversity are often called *intercultural competences* or *capacity of interculturality*. *Intercultural competence* incubates three dimensions (Cucos C., 2000, p.73):

- a) *cognitive competence* (ability to know the culture and language of the people they come into contact with, history, institutions, conceptions of the world, beliefs, customs, rules of networking ...);
- b) *emotional competence* (availability of intercultural adaptation by proving emotional and motivational abilities and empathize);
- c) *operational competence* (the ability to behave in a certain way to experiment intercultural positive behaviors, to combine verbal and nonverbal behavior, etc.).

Basically, communication skills and intercultural interaction are formed / developed by an approach focused on (Nedelcu, A., 2004, p. 64) :

- *Knowledge*. First of all, we must get informed about the culture of others. It takes an inside knowledge, customized by empathic projection.
- *Acceptance*. Even if codes, linguistic or symbolic records, do not coincide, we need to know to listen to the other, to feel his presence, and to know his motives, demands, dreams.
- *Nonverbal communication*. The ability to communicate derives from the science of decoding supra-segmental features of verbal language, reporting to the context of issuing the message itself.
- *Contact with the environment*. Movements in the context of physical, socio-cultural values are a great learning in communication between cultures.
- *Report to the time of the other*. Discovering the universe of the other is an approach that tries to get closer to another dimension of temporality, lived by the other. Intercultural competences promotes the establishment and development of intercultural relations. Intercultural relationship concerns the relationship between representatives of two or more cultures and consists in using the knowledge, capabilities, skills, attitudes of those involved, to facilitate communication, understanding, transfer of information between them.

Intercultural education desires for a pedagogical approach of cultural differences, strategy that takes into consideration general or spiritual specifications, trying to avoid, as much as possible, the risks that appear from the unequal changes among cultures, or, even worse, the tendency to be the same. Thus, intercultural education wants to develop *an education for all in the spirit of acknowledging the differences that are inside the same culture*.

Intercultural education is, in fact, an education of interpersonal relations which involves members from different cultures. Despite of the many definitions, multicultural education has the following aims:

- increasing the efficiency of intercultural relations, increasing the degree of opening, of tolerance, of acceptance of a different person;
- preparing the human being to live diversity as a daily fact, and to find and explain it;
- educating the attitude towards diversity in order not to perceive it as a threatening or shock, but as a source of interest and development.

### 3. The methodology of developing the intercultural competence for students/future teachers

The values that are derived from intercultural education (tolerance, opening, acceptance of differences, understanding diversity) are built within the personalities of the educated ones through sustained efforts. In order to give another dimension to responsibility to teachers, C. Bennett (1998, p.87) identified four dimension of practical realization of the intercultural education objectives, giving a definition to intercultural orientation, intercultural contents, the formal process of intercultural education and intercultural commitment.

*Cultural orientation* is centered on ensuring equal chances and realizing equity among different socio-cultural groups, taking into consideration the changing of school climate by giving another dimension to the hidden syllabus (tagging, out casting and discrimination).

*The intercultural approach of contents* refers to the knowledge and understanding of the cultural differences and using the civilization elements for each group in particular. This perspective integrates the multi-ethnic and global dimensions of the defining characteristics of traditional syllabus (*in the present structure, even though the core-syllabus does not offer sufficient elements of intercultural, there are opportunities to create some experiences of intercultural learning*).

*The process of intercultural education* concentrates on the competence of understanding and the ability to negotiate cultural diversity and accepting differences.

*The intercultural commitment* is oriented to fight extremes by forming proper attitudes and promoting values. It is a cultural alphabetization which requires the individual to take part at a social life.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of the university year of 2013-2014, an investigation based on a questionnaire on 120 students from in final years from the Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, the University in Pitesti was held. The aim of the research was to see the students' perception on the training system for the teaching career. The questionnaire items referred to questions about: the desire to enriching the offer for optional disciplines, the option for different optional disciplines, the argumentation for the necessity of covering the favorite optional discipline. On the list for optional discipline they would like to cover were: *Education for free time, Educating creativity, Intercultural education,, Education for pupils with special needs, Mass-media education.....*

The conclusions on the research, concerning the optional contents they would like to cover during the training program are presented in the following manner:

- at the question about the desire of enriching the offer for optional disciplines, 75,2% of students answered affirmatively;
- 72,27% of the interviewed teachers appreciate that enriching the offer for optional disciplines with *Intercultural Education* would be good.
- at the question about augmenting the option for a discipline 68% of students consider intercultural competence as one of the essential competences for a teacher, which can be seen through the need to

train/develop some individuals conscious of their roots, so that they have reference points to find their place in the world.

According to the interviewed students the present training system for the teaching career should be revised especially at the level of objectives and contents. We consider that the component elements of the training program for students places on a first place Intercultural education among the optional disciplines, in order to answer efficiently to the necessity of socio-economical and cultural-spiritual insertion of young people, to function in their cultural community and outside their cultural frontiers.

The students/future teachers, in order to become agents for developing European values, individual and social, should be highly trained (professionally) at the level of educational competences. Initial professional training should be oriented to forming all necessary competences, so that the trained person feels comfortable in front of the class, in all the situations that may appear during his teaching career. For a good teaching benefit the teacher should have confidence in himself and in his professional competences, to master the solutions for solving critical, tensioned situations so that he can be able to manage typical situations and to develop situations for the unusual ones, to master ways of personal methods of personal recognition- all these and many more identified are indispensable to the teacher's work, where the human subjective side should be known and mastered. Once one is in such a situation in which the capacity of the teacher to master critical situations determines his stress, condition that transfers to children, with whom they interact permanently.

Concerning *key competences* that are to be trained to students/future teachers they can have the following formulations: the students/future teachers should be able to;

- To work with information, technology, knowledge;
- To work with person in their educational environment: students, colleagues, educational partners, and persons outside school;
- To work in society, at different levels of complexity and expression: local, regional, national, European, global.

Intercultural education requires the educational actors not only to participate actively, creative and responsible, but also a continuous effort of interior construction, personal reflection on ideal teachers, efforts for cultivating questioning about their own values and respect towards others. This is why intercultural education can be seen not only as a temporal, transitional measure, or an extension of learning syllabuses, but more than this- an attitude, a state of spirit, a wide system of practices, opening theories to cultural pluralism that crosses the entire educational environment (system of values, models and attitudes of teachers, the contents of syllabuses and course books, evaluation practices, the interaction teacher-student).

#### 4. Conclusions

Given the variety and dynamic of educational environment, it seems that for the teacher who transposes in fact an intercultural curriculum is not sufficient a classic methodological package - finished, closed - it would seem more useful a methodological assembly more flexible, to which the teacher himself confer the final aspect through a personal process of building a methodology and strategy.

Values derived from intercultural education (tolerance, openness, acceptance of differences, understanding diversity, etc.) are built in the personalities of those educated through sustained and systematic efforts.

The results of intercultural education need pragmatic coherence and time perspective, to expand in ways of civic life and social interaction that strengthen respect for human rights and responsibility in the exercise of personal freedom.

Education for multiple values, for diversity and alternation requires the redefining some learning concepts, and even more requires training the teachers from the perspective of moderator and modulator of intercultural communication.

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